



# THE KATHMANDU POST

WITHOUT FEAR OR FAVOUR

Nepal's largest selling English daily

Printed simultaneously in Kathmandu, Biratnagar, Bharatpur and Nepalgunj

Vol XXXI No. 191 | 8 pages | Rs.5  
Monday, August 28, 2023 | 11-05-2080

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Bhairahawa Jomsom

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### WORLD

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**A US Marine Corps aircraft crashed on an Australian island on Sunday, killing three Marines and injuring 20 during a training exercise. A "significant fire in the vicinity of the crash site" was reported. Pg 6**

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**Coach Arteta lamented Arsenal's defensive vulnerability early in games as Fulham became the latest to score a quick goal to put the hosts on the back foot again in Saturday's 2-2 Premier League draw. Pg 7**

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POST PHOTO: RAMESH NUMAR PAUDEL

**Openbill storks pictured on their nest on a dead tree at Batuli Pokhari forest of Chitwan National Park buffer zone in Bharatpur Municipality-8. Dead sal (shorea robusta) trees in the area have been taken over by the Asian openbill storks. (Report on Pg 2)**

## Coalition offers House panel chair to RPP eyeing support in Koshi Province

Rastriya Prajatantra Party leaders, however, reckon they deserve to lead a committee based on their own strength.

By **TIKA R PRADHAN**  
KATHMANDU, AUG 27

Almost eight months after the first meeting of the House of Representatives, the 10 thematic parliamentary committees are set to get their heads on Monday.

Chairpersons of the two joint committees of both the House of Representatives and the National Assembly, however, will be elected later. For the 10 thematic committees of the lower house, 11 candidates have filed nominations for the election of their chairs.

The positions remained vacant for months due to the dispute among the parties represented in Parliament over the leadership of the House committees. Members of the committees were finalised on April 28.

Of the two committees allocated to the CPN (Maoist Centre), the party has decided to cede the leadership of the Infrastructure Development Committee to the right-wing Rastriya Prajatantra Party in a gesture to welcome the reluctant party in a power sharing deal with the ruling coalition.

The RPP's rigid stance against joining the government in Koshi has complicated the government formation process in the province and made it uncertain. But with the RPP prepared to accept the coalition's offer to

lead a House committee, the ruling parties are hopeful that they can save their government in Koshi with the RPP's backing.

Maoist Centre lawmaker Madhav Sapkota was preparing to file his candidacy for the leadership of the committee but in the end, he proposed RPP's Deepak Bahadur Singh as its head. "We reached a deal with the RPP, whereby the party will support the ruling coalition in Koshi. I sacrificed my position in order to save the provincial government in Koshi," Sapkota told the Post.

**Maoist MP Sapkota says he gave up the chair for the stability of Koshi provincial government.**

"Though there is no written agreement, we have received a verbal commitment from the RPP leaders."

If the ruling coalition of the Congress, Maoist Centre, Janata Samajbadi Party and CPN (Unified Socialist) gets the support of six RPP provincial assembly members, the Uddhav Thapa-led government can easily survive.

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## Ministry to send team to India to study salt iodisation process

Rise in non-communicable diseases—hyperthyroidism and cardiovascular conditions—are linked to high iodine intake.

By **ARJUN POUDEL**  
KATHMANDU, AUG 27

The Ministry of Health and Population is planning to send an expert team to India to study the iodisation process of the salt to be imported to Nepal.

Officials say the decision on determining the upper limit for iodine content in salt will be taken as per the report and recommendations of the team following their India visit.

"We are planning to send an expert team to India to check the salt iodisation process," said Lila Bikram Thapa, chief of the nutrition section at the Family Welfare Division of the Department of Health Services.

"Along with health experts, specialists from the Department of Food Technology and Quality Control and the United Nations Children's Fund will be in the team."

Iodine is a mineral found naturally in seafood and plants that grow in areas near the seas. In places where iodine is naturally rare, it needs to be artificially introduced into the diet via fortified food products.

Salt Trading Corporation, the agency responsible for importing and distributing salt in Nepal, fortifies iodine at 50 ppm (parts per million) per kg of salt, which is higher than the recommended dosage. The World Health

Organization recommends iodine concentration at 15 to 40 ppm per kilo.

Officials said the higher iodine level was mandated for Nepal in the 1990s under the assumption that transport and storage times were longer at the time as salt had to be carried on the backs of men and animals and some amount of iodine would dissipate by the time the salt reached markets, mainly in the remote parts of the country. However, now with roads reaching almost all corners of the country, the transport time has signif-

**Salt in Nepal is fortified at 50 ppm currently, higher than WHO's 15 to 40 ppm a kilo limit.**

icantly gone down, so there is no need for such a high level of iodine in salt, according to doctors.

Officials suspect that high iodine content in the salt sold in Nepal could be among the reasons for the high prevalence of several non-communicable diseases, including thyroid disorders in the country.

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## 310 charged with forgery in Lalita Niwas land scam

Investigators rule out organised crime for lack of evidence.

By **PRITHVI MAN SHRESTHA**  
KATHMANDU, AUG 27

The District Attorney's Office, Kathmandu on Sunday filed cases of forgery of government documents at the District Court, Kathmandu against 310 individuals including former ministers and incumbent and retired top bureaucrats in relation with the Lalita Niwas land grab scam.

As many as 52 have been made defendants just for the purpose of recovering government lands. Twenty-one deceased persons are also on the list of defendants against whom no penalty has been sought. But the goal is again to recover lands from those who inherited the government-owned lands of Lalita Niwas, according to the charge sheet.

Of the total defendants, 18 have been arrested while others are at large, according to the charge sheet.

Even though the Central Investigation Bureau (CIB) of Police had also recommended filing cases against them for organised crime, the District Attorney's Office chose only to register the case on the forgery of the government documents citing lack of evidence. According to the charge sheet, organised crime could not be established based on the collected evidence.

"That's why, cases have been filed only for forgery," it says.

Achyut Neupane, chief of the Kathmandu District Attorney's Office, said his office filed cases

of forgery of government documents. "As the incidents took place before the Act on Organised Crime-2013 was introduced, cases were not filed for organised crime retrospectively," he said.

Former Special Court chairperson Gauri Bahadur Karki said a case of organised crime could not be filed against them as the law was introduced in 2013, "even though the nature of their offence hints at organised crime".

The majority of those who now face forgery cases are also dealing with the corruption cases brought by the Commission for Investigation of Abuse of Authority in February 2020.

**52 have been made defendants just for the purpose of recovering government lands.**

Those prosecuted for forgery include former deputy prime minister Bijaya Kumar Gachhadar; former ministers Chandra Deo Joshi, Dambhar Bahadur Shrestha and Chhabi Raj Pant; and former minister of state Sanjay Sah.

Likewise, sitting government secretary Krishna Bahadur Raut and joint secretary Sushil Vaidya have also been made defendants in the case.

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## NATIONAL

## DISTRICT DIGEST

## Municipal staff protest deputy mayor's 'misbehaviour'

**WEST RUKUM:** The employees of Musikot Municipality padlocked the main gate of the municipal office located in Musikot-1 and staged a protest in front of the gate on Sunday. According to Binaram Khadka, acting chief administration officer of the municipality, the employees padlocked and staged a protest after Bimal Kumar Pun, deputy mayor of the municipality, physically assaulted and misbehaved with Narendra Oli, acting chief of the education unit of the municipality, on Saturday in Khadka's office. The employees have submitted a seven-point memo to Mahendra KC, the mayor of the municipality. The office will remain closed until the employees' demands are addressed, said Khadka.

## Bodies of missing mother and son found

**SINDHULI:** The bodies of a 57-year-old mother and her 28-year-old son, residents of Ragechuri, ward 6 of Hariharpurgadhi Rural Municipality who had gone missing while crossing the local Khadkule stream three days ago, were found on Sunday. According to the police, the body of the son was found at the intersection of Kyankhola and Khadkule streams, whereas the body of the mother was found on the bank of the Bagmati River in Rautahat. Both were returning home after collecting firewood and hay from the local Brahmatakur Community Forest, said police.

## Four houses damaged by Olitar landslide

**DOLAKHA:** Four houses were damaged in a landslide at Olitar in ward 3 of Bhigu Rural Municipality on Saturday night. According to Kumar Khadka, a local resident, the landslide, caused by a heavy rainfall, damaged the houses and several cattle sheds. There were no human casualties, but property worth several thousands rupees got damaged in the landslide, according to locals. Several villages in Bhigu and Gaurishankar rural municipalities remain cut off due to several small landslides on Saturday, said Khadka.

## A Chitwan lake is teeming with Asian openbill storks

They arrive at Batuli Pokhari in the buffer zone of the Chitwan National Park at the start of summer, hatch eggs, raise chicks and leave before the winter.



Dozens of openbill storks perched alongside their nests and chicks on a dead sal tree on the Batuli Pokhari lake in Chitwan pictured on Saturday. (Right) A close-up of an openbill stork tending to its chicks at the same location.

**RAMESH KUMAR PAUDEL**  
CHITWAN, AUG 27

Bharatpur Municipality-8 local Dharma Karki had never visited the Batuli Pokhari forest area situated in the buffer zone area of the Chitwan National Park before. He paid his first visit to the lake on Saturday and was pleasantly surprised by what greeted him.

He entered the lake area to unfamiliar sounds and sights. Dead trees around the lake were taken over by flocks of birds with nests on almost every branch.

"When I reached the lake, I heard weird noises. I looked around to see where the sounds were coming from when I noticed dead trees across the lake full of birds," said Karki. "There were many nests too. The chirps of the birds created an idyllic environ-

ment for me to enjoy my first visit to the famed lake."

Batuli Pokhari in Bharatpur Municipality-13 is 12kms south of Bharatpur, the district headquarters of Chitwan. The dead sal (shorea robusta) trees in the area have been taken over by the Asian openbill storks.

According to conservationist Tika Giri, these storks feed on frogs, fishes, small snakes and other creatures found in and around the lake. The availability of feed and trees to nest on has made the area a favourite among the openbill storks.

Located inside the Barandabhar forest, the lake has been conserved by the community forest users since 2000.

The locals of Ganganagar in Bharatpur-13 also use the water from the seasonal springs inside the forest for irrigation.

A tall dam was built southwards of

the fount in 2007 which changed the dimension of the lake. Currently, the waterbody spreads over a minimum of 20 bigha area [13.55 hectare], said Gyanu Sunar, chairperson of the

**These visitors feed on worms and insects in the croplands offering relief to the farmers.**

Baatuli Pokhari Intermediate Community Forest.

As the lake spread wider, wildlife flourished as animals came to drink water. However, the trees in the middle of the lake died. "The dead trees carried a forlorn look until the storks

brought life back to the trees," Sunar said.

According to forest guard Govinda Dawadi, the Asian openbill storks migrate to the lake at the start of summer. They hatch eggs, raise their chicks and leave before winter arrives.

Other winter birds that depend on water bodies for survival, migrate to the area thereafter. However, these birds do not make nests, Dawadi added.

"This has been the trend for the past five to six years. They arrive in such huge numbers that it becomes difficult to even count," Sunar said.

The Asian openbill storks are found in and around water bodies and wetlands in the Tarai region, informed Giri, also the chairman of the Bird Education Society (BES).

The birds feed on worms and insects in the vast farmlands which also ben-

efits the farmers. These avians also help supply oxygen to the rice husks. But the use of pesticides and other chemicals has affected the birds and reduced the amount of feed (insects) in the fields, Giri added.

"Previously, they [the storks] were abundantly found in Lami Taal, inside the Chitwan National Park. Later, they also migrated to other lakes—Chepang Taal, Kumal Taal and Tikauli Taal. These lakes witnessed openbill storks in numbers as high as 600, with as many as 20 nesting on a single tree," Giri said.

Giri further adds that these avians are found in areas away from human settlements, with adequate feed and less danger. Recently, Batuli Pokhari has become their preferred spot.

This is a matter of pride for the locals, and hence, conservation efforts should be ramped up, Giri added.

## District attorney says insufficient evidence of organised crime in Lalita Niwas scam



Those detained in connection with the Lalita Niwas land scam, donning high-visibility jackets, being produced at the Kathmandu District Court on Sunday.

>> CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

The CIB had, however, recommended not to register a case against Raut.

The charge sheet says Raut, who was a section officer at the physical infrastructure ministry at the time, had signed the documents by overstepping the jurisdiction of the erstwhile land reform ministry, paving the way for the transfer of government lands into individual hands.

Former chief commissioner of the Commission for Investigation of Abuse of Authority Deep Basnyat and former government secretaries Dineshshari Adhikari, Narayan Gopal Malego and Yubaraj Bhusal, among others, too have been prosecuted for forgery, according to the charge sheet.

Likewise, middlemen Shobhakant Dhakal and Ram Kumar Subedi, and Bhatbhateni Supermarket owner Min Bahadur Gurung, are other defendants whom the police had identified as key architects of the land scam.

Even though police had recommended filing case against former Election Commissioner Sudhir Shah, the District Attorney's Office didn't make him a defendant, arguing that he had not signed any document related to Lalita Niwas land transfer and he was working at Land Revenue Office in Bhaktapur district when the transfer of lands took place, according to the charge sheet.

As expected, former prime ministers Madhav Kumar Nepal and Baburam Bhattarai avoided prosecution as police didn't take their deposition (statement of potential offender) although the two were interrogated as government's witnesses last week. "As police didn't investigate them, we didn't make them defend-

ants," Neupane said.

The government was forced to record the statements of former prime ministers after the Supreme Court on August 6 ordered that they too be investigated.

In early August, the court had ordered a probe against all those directly involved in the Cabinet decisions of April 11, 2010, May 14, 2010, August 13, 2010 and October 4, 2013, as well as those involved in implementing the decisions—this is in addition to those making and executing minister-level decisions.

The Nepal-led Cabinet had allowed the transfer of government land to individuals. Similarly, the Bhattarai-led Cabinet had permitted the land's registration in the name of an allegedly fake trust by the name of Pashupati Tikinchha Guthi.

Former CPN-UML leader Nepal currently leads the CPN (Unified Socialist) while former Maoist leader Bhattarai leads the Nepal Samajwadi Party, both of which are in the ruling coalition.

"There has obviously been discriminatory treatment between the former prime ministers and others. Those who took decisions avoided prosecution and those who made recommendations for Cabinet decisions and those who implemented such decisions alone faced prosecution," said former Special Court chairperson Karki.

He said that Bhattarai and Nepal would continue to face questions about their involvement in the Lalita Niwas scam and they would continue to carry the stain of the scam in the eyes of the general public.

According to the charge sheet, the District Attorney Office has accused the then minister for land reforms and management

Chandra Deo Joshi of causing a loss totalling Rs631 million to the state. Likewise, it has charged former ministers including Gachhadar, Shrestha and Sah of causing a loss totalling Rs105.11 million each, by giving approval to transfer the government's lands in the name of individuals.

The charge sheet says Sobha Kanta Dhakal and Min Bahadur Gurung, whom the police see as key architects of the scam, have caused a loss of Rs6.84 billion and Rs4.91 billion to the government, respectively, by working to transfer the government-owned lands into the hands of individuals.

They transferred the lands of Lalita Niwas in the names of their own family members and relatives, according to the charge sheet.

The prosecutor has sought recovery of the lands registered in the name of individuals on different dates. According to the charge sheet, the government had lost several plots of lands in 1991 and the prosecutor has sought to recover those lands from 72 owners including individuals, companies and agencies.

The government seeks to recover Lalita Niwas lands from Bhatbhateni Developers Company, DLF Developers, Non Resident Nepali Association, Shobhakant Dhakal, Madhavi Subedi, Uma Kumari Dhakal, Ram Kumar Subedi, among others, who had received the government lands in early 1990s.

Likewise, the charge sheet also seeks the recovery of several plots of lands that were lost in 2005, 2010 and 2013 due to alleged forgery. Besides recovery of lands, the prosecutor has also sought imprisonment of seven years and fines up to Rs70,000 against the defendants as per section 249 (3c) of the Criminal Code Act-2017.

## Coalition eyeing RPP backing to save Koshi government

>> CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

But the parties are waiting for the final decision of the Supreme Court in the Koshi government case, which is sub judice.

Ruling party leaders claimed that they decided to give the House panel leadership to the RPP in a bid to bring the party on board the ruling coalition. But if the RPP leaders' statements are any guide, they still seem reluctant to support the ruling coalition in Koshi.

RPP spokesman Mohan Shrestha said he was unaware of any such agreement with the ruling parties as his party deserved the leadership of at least one parliamentary committee based on its own strength. The party has 14 seats in the House of Representatives.

RPP senior vice chair Buddhiman Tamang, who reached an understanding with the Maoist Centre on the House committee leadership, however, denied having reached any concrete agreement with the party, but said his party deserves to lead the committee in its own right.

"As the issue of Koshi government formation is currently sub judice in the Supreme Court and our party chair is not in the country, we cannot make any deal now," Tamang told the Post. "Neither can we make such a deal, nor can we disclose it [even if we did]."

However, the Maoist Centre leaders are hopeful that things could gradually change after the Supreme Court's decision as RPP leaders have promised their support.

The leaders involved in the negotiations said that the RPP leaders had discussed the deal with Prime Minister Pushpa Kamal Dahal. After they got assurance from RPP chair Rajendra Lingden, who is currently in Dubai, Dahal had agreed to provide one of the two committee chairs to the fifth-largest party in the lower house.

As per the agreement among the parties, Congress got the leadership of three parliamentary committees, the main opposition party UML got two, and other parties—Maoist Centre, RPP, CPN (Unified Socialist) Janata Samajbadi Party, and Janamat Party—one each.

As per the agreement among the parties, Congress lawmaker Ramhari Khatiwada has filed candidacy for the leadership of the State Affairs and Good Governance Committee, Arzu Rana Deuba for Agriculture, Cooperatives and Natural Resources Committee and Santosh Chalise for the

Finance Committee.

UML lawmaker Rishikesh Pokhrel filed his candidacy for the leadership of the Public Accounts Committee, which is generally set aside for the main opposition party, and Kiran Sah, an independent lawmaker who joined the UML earlier this year, has filed his candidacy for the Women and Social Affairs Committee.

The Maoist Centre's Bimala Subedi filed candidacy for Law, Justice and Human Rights Committee and the RPP's Deepak Bahadur Singh for Infrastructure Development Committee.

Earlier, the ruling parties had forged a deal on the parliamentary committee leaderships with the UML bypassing the RPP, but Prime Minister Dahal later agreed to give his party's share to the RPP to secure its support for the Koshi government.

Earlier, the RPP leaders have accused major parties of breaking from the tradition of allowing the parties represented in Parliament to lead parliamentary committees based on their strength, and they therefore had laid claim to the leadership of one committee.

CPN (Unified Socialist) lawmaker Bhanubhakta Jaisi filed his candidacy for the chair of the Health, Education and Information Technology Committee, Rajkishor Yadav of Janata Samajbadi Party for the International Relations and Tourism Committee and Abdul Khan of Janamat Party for Industry and Commerce, Labour and Consumer Welfare Committee.

The two joint committees that have members from both the lower and upper houses have been allocated to the Congress and the UML. The Congress will lead the Parliamentary Hearing Committee while the UML will lead the Committee for Monitoring and Evaluation of the Implementation of the Directive Principles, Policies and Obligations of the State.

The ruling coalition, however, hasn't included the Rastriya Swatantra Party, the fourth largest in the lower house, in the power-sharing deal. The party, which has 21 seats in the lower house, has laid its claim to the Industry, Commerce, Labour and Consumer Welfare Committee. Its lawmaker Ganesh Parajuli filed his candidacy for the committee's leadership on Sunday.

Though nine of the 10 committees have a single candidate with no opponents, according to officials at the parliament secretariat, the results will be announced only on Monday.



RPP lawmaker Deepak Bahadur Singh (third right) files his candidacy for the leadership of a parliamentary panel, Sunday.

PHOTO: COURTESY OF PARLIAMENT SECRETARIAT

## Mobile app to promote maternal and neonatal health

POST REPORT  
KATHMANDU, AUG 27

In a bid to promote maternal and neonatal health, the Ministry of Health and Population on Sunday launched 'Mero Poshan Sathi', a mobile app designed to help people make informed decisions about their health and nutrition behaviour.

Officials hope that the new app will help promote breastfeeding, exclusive breastfeeding practices, antenatal and postnatal care, and child's feeding practices, among others.

"Once the app is downloaded on the Android mobile and registered by the user, it automatically keeps alerting people with nutrition and health-related messages," said Lila Bikram Thapa, chief of the nutrition section at the Family Welfare Division under the Department of Health Services. "This app is designed to help people at various stages of their life—pregnancy, lactating, caregiving, taking care of children below five years, adolescent and old age—to make informed decisions regarding health and nutrition behaviours."

Studies show that Nepal's maternal and neonatal health has been improving over the years but not at the pace to meet the United Nations-backed Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) of health care.

The SDGs, a follow-up on the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), aim at ending poverty and hunger and all forms of inequality in the world by 2030, and Nepal has committed to meeting the target.

According to the Nepal Demographic and Health Survey-2022, breastfeeding has been continuously declining from 70 percent in 2011 to 56 percent last year despite spending millions of rupees every year on the awareness drive.

The report showed that the exclusive breastfeeding rate has fallen from 66 percent in 2016 to 56 percent in 2022.

Health officials are concerned that more educated and well-off mothers are less likely to exclusively breastfeed their babies, as shown by the studies.

Along with breastfeeding practices, the app will alert parents about their children's feeding habits and their growth monitoring, encourage pregnant women to receive antenatal and postnatal care, and take iron folic acid regularly.

"This app is not only useful to pregnant women and new mothers but also to the adolescent and elderly people," said Thapa. "Once it is downloaded and registered, even the internet is not necessary to get health tips."

The app, developed with the technical support of the United States Agency for International Development, enables access to information about health and nutrition service delivery points in their surroundings in Nepal.



A view of the residences at Bhainsepati in Lalitpur that Prime Minister Pushpa Kamal Dahal handed over to the province heads and chief ministers on Sunday.

POST PHOTO: ELITE JOSHI

# Koshi becomes first province to be in a budget holiday

The deadline for the budget ordinance either to be endorsed as it is or be replaced with a new bill has ended.

NISHAN KHATIWDA  
KATHMANDU, AUG 27

The Koshi Province has entered a budget holiday.

The deadline for the budget ordinance either to be endorsed as it is or be replaced with a new bill ended on Sunday.

The CPN-UML's Hikmat Karki government had brought the budget through ordinance on June 15. The Koshi provincial government unveiled a Rs36.24 billion budget for the fiscal year 2023-2024. Province Head Parsuram Khapung authenticated the 'Koshi Province Financial Ordinance 2023' and 'Koshi Province Appropriation Ordinance 2023'.

A day earlier, Khapung had prorogued the provincial assembly after the government presented its policies and programmes.

The Constitution of Nepal has set a 60-day deadline to endorse an ordinance.

Article 202 of the constitution says ordinances become ineffective if they are not endorsed within 60 days from the first sitting of the new provincial assembly session.

After the Supreme Court issued an interim order for a second time in the name of the Uddhav Thapa-led provincial government not to take any important decisions, the doors to endorse the budget brought through an ordinance have closed.

The court on Thursday ruled that the vote of confidence secured by the chief minister on Monday was unconstitutional. The Thapa government has now been reduced to a caretaker.

Amid this situation, Koshi Minister for Financial Affairs Baburam Gautam said the ruling coalition will go to the court seeking a way out. "We will go to the court asking for a way out to save the province from suffering a budget holiday. We will issue an ordinance if the court clears the path for us," he said.



Uddhav Thapa

POST FILE PHOTO

The ruling coalition was planning to register the replacement bill but could not do so due to the obstructions from the opposition parties. Thus the Assembly session ended

on Wednesday.

In the 93-member provincial assembly, the main opposition UML is the largest party with 40 seats. The Congress has 29 seats, the Maoist Centre 13, the RPP 6, the CPN (Unified Socialist) 4, and the Janata Samajbadi Party has one seat.

The government then was planning to bring another ordinance, but the Supreme Court issued the interim order at the same time.

Article 202 (1) of the constitution states, "In case, at any time, except when the Provincial Assembly is in session, a circumstance exists which renders it necessary to take immediate action, the chief of the province may, on the recommendation of the provincial council of ministers, promulgate an ordinance."

A confusion has now surfaced over whether the government, barred from taking any long-term decision and reduced to a caretaker status, can issue the ordinance.

Experts say even the caretaker government can issue the budget ordinance.

Constitutional expert Bipin Adhikari said the court's order about the long-term decision does not intend to bar the budget because it is a recurring necessity.

"The only option now is to bring the ordinance again. The new ordinance should be the same as the earlier one," Adhikari told the Post.

Former finance secretary Rameshore Khanal echoed Adhikari saying that the caretaker government can also issue the budget-related ordinance as no law bars it from doing so.

But, as the deadline has already passed, the province will suffer a budget holiday.

A budget holiday basically means the government expenditures will be suspended. "If the Thapa-led government cannot bring the ordinance, the province cannot make the budget expenditure," Khanal said.

## Prime Minister Dahal pledges fair probe, prosecution in multiple scams

POST REPORT  
KATHMANDU, AUG 27

A team of the campaign to transform Nepali Congress met Prime Minister Pushpa Kamal Dahal on Sunday requesting the latter to indict all those guilty in corruption, smuggling and other scams.

A 10-member delegation of Congress leaders met the prime minister at Singha Durbar and demanded that the government conduct a fair and unbiased investigation into the Lalita Niwas land grab scam, the recent gold smuggling, and the fake Bhutanese refugee scam.

**Dahal reiterated his commitment at a meeting with a group of Congress leaders.**

The team urged the prime minister to book all those involved in the crimes, regardless of their positions or any other allegiance. They also requested to reach to the root of the fake Bhutanese refugee scam, and punish all those guilty, including Maoist leaders, in the gold smuggling.

According to Bhubendra Jung Shahi, one of the leaders present at the meeting, the prime minister pledged to not back out from his commitment to prosecute all those found guilty.

"I am committed to take this campaign to a logical end and I will not back down from my commitment to punish the corrupt people," Shahi quoted Dahal as saying.

A group of second-rung and other leaders have launched a campaign to transform Nepali Congress and have been conducting programmes in various parts of the country.

## Gynaecologist to be charged with organised crime, human trafficking and forced disappearance

BINOD BHANDARI  
BIRATNAGAR, AUG 27

The District Police Office in Morang is preparing to charge Dr Tapeshwar Lal Karn, a senior gynaecologist and former medical superintendent at Koshi Hospital, for three different offences—organised crime, human trafficking and forced disappearance.

Police said it also wrote a letter to the authorities concerned urging them to investigate Karn for illegally amassing property.

"We are preparing to charge him for three crimes. The legal process to file charges against him was obstructed after Karn was readmitted to the hospital following health complaints. The process of recording his statement is yet to be completed," said Deputy Superintendent of Police Ranjan Kumar Dahal, who is also the spokesman for the Morang District Police Office. Karn, aged 68, was readmitted to Koshi Hospital on Saturday.

On August 18, police detained Karn from Green Cross Hospital in Biratnagar on the charge of selling a newborn to a childless couple for Rs500,000.

Police claimed that Karn had been involved in selling babies born through illicit relationships to childless couples, some of them Indians as well, for the past 10 years.

Morang police said they would also seek help from the Central Investigation Bureau in the investigation against the gynaecologist.

In the latest incident, Karn allegedly sold an infant born to an unmarried couple from Bhojpur

district. A 26-year-old woman gave birth to the baby at Green Cross Hospital under Karn's medical supervision on June 29.

The infant's father had taken his eight-month-pregnant girlfriend to Karn's clinic.

She gave birth to the infant the next day at the hospital. The incident came to light after the infant's father ran away leaving the woman at an Itahari-based hotel.

**Police had earlier detained Dr Karn on charge of selling a newborn to a childless couple.**

Police investigation revealed that Karn had sold the infant to the couple of Kathari Rural Municipality-2 in Morang through a staff member working at the operation theatre of the Green Cross Hospital.

The staff member is a relative of the childless couple.

The investigation is underway after taking five people, including Karn, into custody, said police.

The police have been investigating some private hospitals and clinics in Biratnagar where Dr Karn worked.

Karn had worked for over two and a half decades at the Department of Gynaecology of the Koshi Hospital.

He was the medical superintendent of the hospital from April 2 to September 30, 2014.

## Ministry to review iodine content in salt

>> Continued from page 1

Earlier, at high-level meet comprising representatives from the World Health Organization, UNICEF, the US-based Centres for Disease Control and Prevention, and the Ministry of Health and Population—have found that Nepal consumes excessive amounts of iodine, which resulted in high prevalence of hyperthyroidism.

The survey shows, more than two-thirds—68 percent—of the population across the country is consuming iodine in excess of the recommended levels.

According to Non-communicable Disease Risk Factors: Steps Survey-2019, 5.6 percent of adults (6.5 percent of women and 4.6 percent of men) reported adding salt often or always to food right before or while eating.

Additionally, 19.5 percent of adults (18.1 percent of the women and 21.1 percent of men) reported consuming processed foods that are high in salt often or always.

Doctors say excessive salt intake has

not only increased the problem of thyroid disorders, it is also attributed to be a key risk factor for hypertension, which is a major cause of premature deaths worldwide.

A change in dietary patterns and increased consumption of processed foods (including packaged soups), resulted in an increased prevalence of non-communicable diseases such as hypertension, and cardiovascular diseases, according to doctors.

The UN health agency recommends less than two grams of sodium or five grams of salt per day for adults to reduce blood pressure, and cut the risks of cardiovascular diseases and stroke. It also recommends policies to reduce salt intake, including food product reformulation, establishing a supportive environment in public institutions, organising communications and mass media campaigns, and front-of-pack labelling to prevent and control non-communicable diseases.



A damaged Bailey bridge at Diphlight in Solukhumbu. The link between Thulung Dudhkoshi 7 and Sotang 1 wards has been cut off by recent floods.

PHOTO: COURTESY OF SURYA KILLING

OPINION



OUR VIEW

Good riddance

Supreme Court order on pork barrel funds is a major step towards curbing corruption.

In a landmark interim order last week, the Supreme Court halted the implementation of the controversial Constituency Infrastructure Development Programme (CIDP), also known as the Constituency Development Fund, at both federal and provincial levels. A five-member constitutional bench led by Chief Justice Bishowambhar Prasad Shrestha on Wednesday last week issued the interim order, asking the federal and provincial governments not to implement the programme, provisioned in the 445th point of the annual budget for the fiscal year 2023-24. The apex court's order has essentially nullified the extravagant programme—if, as hoped, the final verdict upholds the interim order. This order goes a long way in righting the wrong committed way back in 1994, when a similar scheme was started under the CPN-UML chair Manmohan Adhikari-led government.

As expected, lawmakers of several political parties, including the ruling Nepali Congress, represented in Parliament have criticised the top court for “breaching” its jurisdiction and infringing upon the legislature’s lawmaking authority. But why are the lawmakers so worked up by the top court’s order? The answer is simple: The leaders have lost their cash cow, a generous fund that would help pay for the *dana-pani* of their cronies. Over the years, the fund had become nothing short of a white elephant, with government after government continuing and fattening this extravagant programme, with a few halts in between. Lately the fund had come under intense criticism, as the governments had failed to justify its utility in the federal set-up, where the image of a lawmaker as a “conduit of development” had given way to a new image as a “maker of the law”.

The fact that many governments in the last three decades were coalitions with multiple partners helped turn the fund into a bargaining chip for lawmakers. Unable to bear the pressure of the coalition partners, finance ministers kept giving them as much as they wanted. The current finance minister, Prakash Sharan Mahat, allocated Rs50 million to each of the 165 federal constituencies after a gap of two years, when the funds were diverted to fight the Covid-19 pandemic. With the central government reviving the fund, provincial governments followed suit, adding to its unpopularity and prompting calls for it to be scrapped altogether. This, at a time when such funds had become redundant following the adoption of federalism, with significant functions related to infrastructure, education, and effective governance, among other things, devolved to the local level.

The apex court’s order has also brought to the fore the much-neglected idea of separation of powers vis-a-vis Parliament. Over the years, the legislative functions of the federal parliament and provincial assemblies have been sorely misinterpreted, as lawmakers have increasingly assumed executive roles, with a greater say in budgeting. Moreover, they have become so enmeshed in the despicable game of making and breaking governments that House sessions have failed to pass bills of national importance. A classic case was the first House session after the November elections that ended without passing a single bill. The quarrels between the ruling and opposition parties have led to several obstructions in the House, leaving it unable to fulfil any legislative duty. In such a scenario, the top court’s interim order is a timely reminder to the lawmakers that they should get back to fulfilling their legislative duties and stop eyeing state coffers for personal gains.

MY CUP OF TEA

Nepali politics is so volatile that it is hard to predict what will happen in six months, much less four years.

BISWAS BARAL



Four years is a long time in politics. In Nepal, where post-1990 governments have lasted an average of nine months, it is an eternity.

Big or small, most of Nepal’s political parties are embarking on their own version of “Mission 84”, the next set of elections four years (and two months) down the road. Why the rush, you wonder?

For established parties, this jumpstart to their electoral campaigns betrays a deep sense of insecurity, even an existential crisis. The recent success of the Rabi Lamichhane-led Rastriya Swatantra Party (RSP) and the popularity of Balendra Shah and Harka Sampang as mayors of Kathmandu and Dharan, respectively, have shaken them to the core. If they don’t hit the ground running now, they expect the newbies to trounce them in the next elections.

More understandable are the party expansion campaigns of the RSP and CK Raut’s Janamat Party, the two new stars of the November 2022 elections. They, too, have an eye on the 2027 (2084 BS) elections.

Nepali politics is so volatile that it is hard to predict what will happen in six months, much less four years. The Pushpa Kamal Dahal-led government has barely survived nine months in office, with KP Sharma Oli constantly tugging at the rug under the prime minister. Multiple sources of instability lurk all around, not least the never-ending drama in Koshi Province that might push it into early elections—and throw national politics into turmoil.

So, planning the nitty-gritty of elections so far off is an exercise in futility. What the political parties represented in Parliament should be doing right now is getting down to the business of governing and legislating in the public interest. By not doing so, they are dishonouring the mandate of 2022.

The established parties are steadily losing ground. There have been two full elections since the 2015 promulgation of the new constitution. The CPN-UML got 26.9 percent of all votes cast in the 2022 general elections, with the Nepali Congress hot on the heels at 25.7 percent, followed by the Maoist Centre at

Missions impossible



PHOTO: COURTESY OF CPN-UML

11.1 percent. Five years before that, the vote shares were: 31.1 percent for the UML, 36.6 percent for the Congress and 15.3 percent for the Maoist Centre.

Then, in the 2023 byelections, in the Chitwan-2 constituency, the UML candidate won 14.49 percent of the votes while the Congress candidate got 14.14 percent. The winner, RSP’s Rabi Lamichhane, secured 70.03 percent. Likewise, in the Tanahun-2 byelections, in the heart of the Congress land, RSP’s Swarnim Wagle got 54.57 percent votes against 31.45 percent for the Congress candidate and 13.27 percent for the UML candidate.

The traditional parties say they want to strengthen their organisation and cadre base. Yet many cadres, especially the young ones, are uninterested in renewing their party affiliation and fast decamping to the newer outfits.

Without a change in leadership, the likes of the Congress and the UML will struggle to be competitive again. People are in no mood right now to vote for the parties led by Deuba, Oli or Dahal; the calls for party and national renewal coming from these repeatedly tried-and-tested faces just do not ring true.

At least in the Congress, Sher Bahadur Deuba cannot run for party president again and so a new face will lead the party into the next elections. Whether the new leader is an old establishment face or someone the public trusts more will make all

the difference in its electoral fortunes.

The UML and the Maoist Centre are at a disadvantage on this front. In the UML, Oli is again likely to lead the party into the next round of elections. But Oli’s reputation as a leader has been tarred by his repeated dissolution of Parliament in his previous term as prime minister. Oli’s post-blockade nationalist credentials are also much diminished. If, by some fluke, Bidya Devi Bhandari takes up UML leadership, the party’s chances won’t improve much either. Bhandari’s public standing is arguably worse than Oli’s, following her two highly controversial terms as the country’s president.

Currently, the UML’s target of expanding its cadre base and winning 51 percent of all votes cast in the next election looks implausible. If anything, the party is going backwards. It has been able to renew the memberships of only around 50 percent of its cadres: It has done the best in Gandaki and Lumbini provinces, with a 60-65 percent renewal rate, while in Madhesh, it could retain only 30 percent of its members.

No such figures are available for the Maoist Centre. But with the leadership scrambling for resources to run arguably the most expensive party machinery in Nepal, Dahal and his once revolutionary party are now fighting for their very existence. Perhaps no other figure in Nepali politics is trust-

ed as little as the Janus-faced Dahal.

But what about the RSP and, as many now dare to whisper, a new party of Balendra Shah? While there is considerable youth support for these new rockstars of Nepali politics, their fans, unbound by any ideology, are fickle. If, say, Gagan Thapa is tomorrow elected the Congress leader, he could, at the head of a party with solid pro-democratic and liberal history, capture the public imagination again.

The RSP’s recent struggle to come up with a political document is also suggestive of the challenges that lie ahead. So far, it has been able to sell, to borrow from Yuval Noah Harari, “simple and compelling” stories to the masses—and Lamichhane is a consummate raconteur. (And so is a rapping Shah, for that matter.) But the reality of governing the country is far messier. The task is made harder still from a place of an ideological void that the RSP occupies.

The grandees of the big parties are betting on the RSP’s split. It is not uncommon to hear top Congress and UML leaders discuss possible ways of pitting Lamichhane against Shah come 2027 so that they cancel each other out.

The problem again is that these calculations are premature. Nepal’s political course is filled with bumpy roads and hairpin bends. Moreover, if the national parties cannot fulfil the mandate they already have, how do people trust them to deliver four years later?

MONDAY INTERVIEW RAMESH LEKHAK

You cannot mistrust people’s representatives on every issue

The fund for the CIDP was allocated through the appropriation bill, which is a finance bill. Even the President cannot return the finance bills for a review.

The Nepali Congress, senior coalition partner in the incumbent Pushpa Kamal Dahal Cabinet, has expressed discontent over “partiality” against its leaders in investigation of different criminal cases. It also has reservations over the Supreme Court’s interim order to halt the implementation of the Constituency Infrastructure Development Programme (CIDP). Against this backdrop, the *Post’s* Binod Ghimire sat down with Ramesh Lekhak, the Congress chief whip, to discuss the government’s performance, internal dynamics in the party and its relations with the main opposition. As a member of the sub-committee studying the amendment bill to the Enforced Disappearances Enquiry, Truth and Reconciliation Commission Act, Lekhak also touches on the vital issue of transitional justice.

programme. They just recommend projects from their constituency. What is a lawmaker supposed to do if s/he cannot even recommend development programmes to the government?

**But don’t you think development works should be undertaken by the executive rather than the lawmakers, as the interim court verdict also suggests?**

I am talking about resource allocation. The final authority on resource allocation is Parliament. If not Parliament, who else can decide resource allocation? Let me make it very clear, under the CIDP, the parliamentarians only recommend projects but are not involved in project implementation.

In a democracy, the people’s court is the highest court. Only after being endorsed by this court can you be a lawmaker. My people have the first authority to reward and punish me. They will punish me in next election if I do something wrong. How can those who are never tested in the court of people take every decision of the state? You cannot mistrust people’s representatives on every issue. Having said that, we fully abide by the court’s rulings. However, we also have to raise questions if its decisions contradict the spirit of the constitution.

**Do you think the Supreme Court’s ruling against the formation of the Koshi government is also judicial activism?**

I have a clear position on this matter. All decisions relating to the government formation in the Koshi Province, of late, are not in line with the constitution and laws. I have been saying this for a long time.

**On the national front, is the Congress satisfied with the performance of its ministers and the government as a whole?**

The party is yet to evaluate the performance of its ministers. It will be too early to make such evaluations, even



Ramesh Lekhak, Nepali Congress chief whip

before the ministers have completed a year in office. The party will analyse their work at the right time.

When it comes to the government, our party is not unhappy. The pressure in the economy and budget is a big drag in the government’s output. It is natural for the lawmakers and the leaders to have some dissatisfaction. However, as a whole, the government is headed in the right direction.

**But your party President Sher Bahadur Deuba and some party leaders seem dissatisfied with the way some criminal cases involving Congress leaders are being pursued.**

The top leadership is also our guardian. With a long experience, it is natural for them to comment on some of the government’s actions. That in no way means a political accident is imminent.

**Does the Congress feel that there is some political bias in the investigation of such criminal acts?**

I don’t think there is strong dissatis-

faction in the party. However, the prosecution in any offence must be done in line with existing laws, without any misinterpretation. It would be wrong to prosecute someone solely with the intent of keeping them behind bars. Party leaders have been arguing that wrong interpretation of laws, in some cases, should be stopped. Let’s hope the government can start a course correction on these issues.

**A dissident faction of your party led by Shekhar Koirala, however, has been vocal against the present government.**

Our party has a clear position that it wants the continuation of the present alliance and it is against formation of any new political alliance. The Congress wants stability and continuation of the current alliance.

**When will the party hold its policy convention as discussed in last month’s Central Working Committee meeting?**

Our recent parliamentary party meeting made a unanimous decision that as the present coalition was formed with the initiation and support of the Nepali Congress, the party should work to make it stable and effective. This is a political decision. The leaders you named also have agreed on this.

**We also hear demands for a change in party leadership.**

There are set processes to change the party leadership and the party statute. It can be done only through the general convention. It is neither possible nor is politically right to demand for leadership change before the general convention. Let us wait until the general convention to do it the legitimate way.

**You are also a member of the sub-committee studying the amendment bill to the Enforced Disappearances Enquiry, Truth and Reconciliation Commission Act. Why hasn’t the panel been able to finalise the bill?**

The cross-party lawmakers in the sub-committee are close to a consensus. We will give the bill a final shape after discussing it with top leaders. The prolonged House obstruction had

delayed such consultations. Now that we have sorted out the issues that led to House obstruction, the consultations will soon begin.

**The UML is strongly in favour of listing ‘murder’ as ‘non-amnestiable crime’ while it is also pitching for the incorporation of former child soldiers in the law. How will you find meeting points on these issues?**

We are very close to ironing out our differences on the issue of murder. Let me remind you, the UML government in the past had honoured the former child soldiers as democratic fighters. Now they are no more child soldiers. I, therefore, don’t see any need to incorporate anything about them in the bill.

We are having intense discussions with cross-party leaders, experts and other stakeholders. We will make a mature decision this time by addressing the concerns of different quarters. There is a broad understanding that it might take some time but the bill should be a unanimous document.

**Have you also agreed on the composition of two transitional justice commissions that have been vacant for a year now?**

No, we haven’t discussed the selection of office-bearers in the commissions. The parties will not be involved in the selection process. It will be done through a transparent process. However, there is broad agreement among the parties that competent people with high integrity should be selected to lead the commissions.

In my opinion, the two years given to complete investigations, as provided in the bill, is too short. They should get four years. Transitional justice is very complex and we shouldn’t be too ambitious. The Comprehensive Peace Accord said the whereabouts of the disappeared would be made public in 60 days. It’s been 16 years and we still haven’t been able to implement it. We need to be realistic while setting the deadline. I am confident that we will have a good law in place this time.

FOREX

US Dollar	132.54
Euro	143.17
Pound Sterling	166.72
Swiss Franc	149.81
Australian Dollar	84.84
Canadian Dollar	97.42
Singapore Dollar	97.76
Japanese Yen (10)	9.05
Chinese Yuan	18.18
Saudi Arab Riyal	35.33
Qatari Riyal	36.36
Thai Bhat	3.77
UAE Dhiram	36.08
Malaysian Ringgit	28.56
Korean Won (100)	10.01

Exchange rates fixed by Nepal Rastra Bank

SHARES

Nepse (in percent) 1,993.58pts -1.02%

HIGHEST LOSERS					
MAKAR	LEC	USHL	MSLB	KKHC	HHL
-9.63	-6.3	-5.79	-5.68	-5.51	-4.98
MODERATE LOSERS					
MCHL	NMBM	GRDBL	DHPL	IHL	GCIL
-4.97	-4.85	-4.84	-4.46	-4.31	-4.25
MODERATE GAINERS					
NIBD84	NIBSF2	BNT	SPC	SFEF	SIGS2
2	2	2.4	2.44	3.29	3.76
HIGHEST GAINERS					
SEF	USHEC	PPL	CMF2	SMFBS	KBSH
3.88	4.89	5.18	5.88	6	10

BULLION PRICE PER TOLA

Fine Gold	Rs 111,100
Silver	Rs 1,465

SOURCE: FENEGOSIDA

BIZLINE

Australia concerned about China economy, monitoring 'very closely'

**SYDNEY:** Australian Treasurer Jim Chalmers said on Sunday the government was closely watching China amid "concerning" signs of economic weakness that could weigh on Australia's economy. "I share the pretty substantial concerns that people have voiced about the Chinese economy," Chalmers told Sky News television. "It is concerning to see the weakness, the softness, in the recent weeks and months in the Chinese economy because it has obvious implications for us here in Australia." Recovery in China, the world's second-largest economy, has sputtered due to a worsening property slump, weak consumer spending and tumbling credit growth, prompting the authorities to slash interest and promise further support while analysts downgrade growth forecasts. (REUTERS)

China halves stamp duty on stock trades to boost market

**BEIJING:** China halved the stamp duty on stock trading effective on Monday in the latest attempt to boost the struggling market as a recovery sputters in the world's second-biggest economy. The finance ministry said in a brief statement on Sunday it was reducing the 0.1 percent duty on stock trades "in order to invigorate the capital market and boost investor confidence". Reuters reported on Friday that the authorities were planning to cut the duty by up to half after a key share index fell to nine-month lows. "Such a policy will likely give a short-term boost to the market but won't have much effect over the long run," Xie Chen, a fund manager at Shanghai Jianwen Investment Management Co, said before the announcement. (REUTERS)

# Nepalis hit by rising prices every which way

As if costlier food was not enough, the government has been finding new ways to tax its inflation-stricken citizens.

By KRISHANA PRASAIN  
KATHMANDU, AUG 27

While a series of measures by India to tighten food exports has pushed up local prices, the government is making life harder for Nepalis by increasing taxes on food, say analysts.

After India ordered a ban on exports of non-basmati rice on July 20, the price of rice shot up by Rs200 to Rs400 per 20-kg bag. Coming just ahead of the autumn festival season, it is a big blow to Nepali consumers.

India issued the embargo in response to rising food prices, high inflation and fear of rice shortages due to El Nino disruptions as the country heads into the festive season and elections.

Nepalis had barely recovered from the shock when India slapped a 40 percent export duty on onion on August 19. The spicy bulb suddenly became scarce in domestic markets.

Onion is indispensable to South Asian cooking, and India is the world's largest exporter. According to insiders, the customs duty is intended to stem exports to neighbouring countries and cool inflation in vegetable products.

India's neighbours will have to live with higher prices of onions because of the steep export duty till December 31. And on Friday, India imposed a 20 percent export duty on parboiled rice with immediate effect. Experts say the move could further reduce shipments by the world's largest exporter and lift global rice prices, which are already close to 12-year highs.

India extended a ban on wheat exports after curbing rice shipments in September 2022. The southern neighbour has also capped sugar exports this year as cane yields dropped.

As if costlier food from India was not enough, the Nepal government has been finding new ways to tax its inflation-stricken citizens.

No value-added tax can be levied on potatoes, onions and other daily consumable farm products as per the Value Added Tax Act of 1996. But that was a minor hurdle for the government which promptly amended the law through the Financial Bill 2023, and removed 170 goods from the tax-free list.

So the new fiscal year began with 13 percent VAT on vegetables and other food items on top of the 9 percent agriculture service charge and 1.5 percent advance tax for a total of 23.5 percent



POST FILE PHOTO

Government said in its budget statement presented on May 29 that inflation was gradually moderating, but it remains above the desired limit.

in taxes. The Financial Bill has imposed 13 percent VAT on imported onions, potatoes, garlic, peas, frozen green leafy vegetables, collard greens, beans, spinach, sweet corn and other green vegetables.

"The government's tax policy shows that Nepal is not a welfare state," said Nara Bahadur Thapa, former executive director of Nepal Rastra Bank.

"If consumer interests were a top priority, no taxes would be imposed on food items. This is a totally wrong strategy."

Thapa said that inflation was already high in Nepal, and the new taxes would cause an inflationary burst this year.

The central bank's statistics show that the annual average consumer price inflation stood at 7.74 percent in the last fiscal year 2022-23 ended mid-July, compared to 6.32 percent in the previous fiscal year.

Under the food and beverage category, the annual average consumer price

index of the restaurant and hotel sub-category increased by 14.42 percent, spices by 12.50 percent, cereal grains and their products by 10.70 percent and milk products and eggs by 9.23 percent.

The figures show that food inflation is already above the double-digit figure, and a further rise may impact millions of Nepalis who spend more than 80 percent of their income on consumption, mostly food.

Even as food prices are soaring out of control, the government has announced its aim to keep inflation within 6.5 percent this fiscal year.

"It has been two to three years since the price of goods has been increasing continuously. This has made it difficult for us to survive," said Siddhi Gorkhali, who works in a corporate office.

"My salary has not increased in the last several years, but the price of a 25-kg bag of rice has jumped by more than Rs500 within a year."

Gorkhali said that since his month-

ly income was not enough for his growing expenses, he has had to dip into his savings which he has deposited for future use.

In the markets, the prices are rising fast, and they are unstoppable.

Pearl brand rice, which used to cost Rs2,150 per 25-kg bag in July, rose to Rs2,451 after India's ban on rice exports. Lentils (mushuro) now cost Rs170 per kg, up from Rs150 last month.

The price of jeera has reached Rs1,400 to Rs1,500 from Rs450-500 per kg five months ago. The wholesale price of tomato increased by 36.31 percent to Rs54 per kg in the last three months, according to the Kalimati Fruit and Vegetable Market.

The wholesale price of onion dry has surged by 115.45 percent to Rs74.33 per kg. The wholesale price of potato rose by 13.97 percent to Rs35.33 per kg after the government imposed 13 percent VAT through the budget statement.

"As the list of measures used to cal-

## Modi says India as G20 host will be inclusive

Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi invites African Union to become permanent members of the forum.

By ASSOCIATED PRESS  
NEW DELHI, AUG 27

Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi said the country's role as the G20 host this year would focus on highlighting the concerns of the developing world, and has proposed the African Union to become permanent members of the forum.

"We have a vision of inclusiveness and with that vision, we have invited the African Union to become permanent members of the G20," Modi said on Sunday as he addressed the Business 20 Summit in New Delhi.

The B20 is an industry event and part of the summit of the 20 leading rich and developing nations, which will be hosted in the Indian capital next month.

Over three days, industry and policy leaders from around the world have discussed themes like building resilient supply chains, digital transformation, debt distress facing developing countries and how to advance on climate change goals. Their recommendations will be shared with the G20 governments, organisers said.



AP/IPS

Narendra Modi speaks at the Business 20 Summit in New Delhi, India on Sunday.

As host of the G20 this year, India has struggled to bridge the differences among member countries over the war in Ukraine.

None of the several meetings held in the country has succeeded in producing a communique, sparking questions over whether the leaders meeting next month will break the

deadlock. Instead, India has consistently appealed for the fractured grouping to reach consensus on issues that disproportionately affect developing countries, or the so-called Global South. They include unsustainable debt levels, inflation and the threat of climate change, even if the broader East-West split over Ukraine can't be resolved.

A key part of that strategy is bringing the African Union into the G20 fold, analysts say.

"When India assumed the G20 presidency last December, we were acutely conscious that most of the Global South would not be at the table when we meet," said External Affairs Minister Subrahmanyan Jaishankar. "This mattered very much because the really urgent problems are those faced by them. ... And India, itself so much a part of the Global South, could not stand by and let that happen."

He said the G20 has so far deliberated on rising debt, sustainable development, climate action and food security, among other issues that affect low to middle-income countries.

"The core mandate of the G20 is to

promote economic growth and development. This cannot advance if the crucial concerns of the Global South are not addressed," Jaishankar added.

The three-day conference in New Delhi was also attended by ministers and policymakers from other G20 countries, including the United Kingdom and India's regional rival, China.

On Friday, China's Vice Commerce Minister Wang Shouwen said trade between the two neighbouring countries, whose relations have been strained after deadly border clashes in 2020, was growing fast.

He added that India was welcome to join the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership, a China-centred Asian trade bloc that was formed last year.

Piyush Goyal, India's minister of commerce and industry, said that joining the bloc would have increased trade between the two Asian giants, but it would have also increased the trade deficit.

India's trade deficit with China is the highest of any country, and stood at \$101.28 billion in 2022, according to official data.

## Cause of Kenya's longest power outage in memory remains unclear

By ASSOCIATED PRESS  
NAIROBI, AUG 27

The longest nationwide power outage in Kenya's memory remained a mystery on Sunday as the government-owned power company blamed a failure at Africa's largest wind farm, which laid the responsibility on the power grid instead.

Some of Kenya's more than 50 million people, including in the capital, Nairobi, saw power return almost 24 hours after the massive outage occurred late Friday. It was an embarrassment to the East African economic hub that has sought to promote itself as a tech centre on the continent but remains challenged by alleged mismanagement and poor infrastructure.

State-owned power company blames wind farm which in turn says power grid at fault.

The head of the Kenya Airports Authority was fired after a generator serving the main international terminal had failed to start. Shortly before midnight Saturday, Kenya Power offered the first detailed explanation of the outage, blaming it on a loss of power generation from the Lake Turkana Wind Power plant, Africa's largest wind farm, causing an imbalance that "tripped all other main generation units and stations, leading to a total outage on the grid."

But Lake Turkana Wind Power in a statement denied it was to blame. Instead, it said it had been forced to go offline by an "overvoltage situation in the national grid system which, to avoid extreme damage, causes the wind power plant to automatically switch off." The plant had been producing nearly 15 percent of the national output at the time.

## Chepe Khola hydro project accused of encroaching forest land

By AASH GURUNG  
LAMJUNG, AUG 27

Nearly a year after its operation, the Division Forest Office in Lamjung has charged Ashutosh Energy, the Chepe Khola Small Hydropower Project promoter, for not obtaining permits to cut down trees on the construction site.

The 8.63-megawatt project in Dudh Pokhari Rural Municipality started generating electricity on October 2 last year.

The forest office said that the project has encroached on the forest land. The electricity generated by the project has been connected to the national grid via a 21-kilometre transmission line.

The forest office said the project encroached 2.62 hectares of forest land to construct a 3.45 km long pipeline.

In addition to that, the hydropower project has also encroached on 6.8 hectares of forest in Dudh Pokhari and Dordi Rural Municipalities to build the 33 kV transmission line.

Purneshwor Subedi, the divisional forest officer, said that the hydropower

company did not receive any permission to clear the trees.

Chief District Officer Ram Krishna Adhikari has formed a probe committee chaired by Shankar Puri, a forest officer at the divisional forest office in Rainas.

"The investigation committee is doing a field visit and measuring the encroached land," said Puri.

"After completing the investigation in a month, we will file a case against the company in court."

The division forest office has also asked for clarifications from the sub-divisional forest office in Rainas for not being vigilant when the project construction began.

The division forest office, on June 9, wrote to the Nepal Electricity Authority to detach the transmission line of the hydropower project until the investigation is completed.

The office has also informed the Ministry of Forest and Environment, Ministry of Energy, Water Resources and Irrigation, Ministry of Industries, Supplies and Commerce, District Police Office and other government agencies regarding the issue.

The Division Forest Office has also requested the concerned authorities to refrain from purchasing electricity from the project and to hold payments.

In addition to that, it has also sought their support in preventing other similar unlawful activities.

Kiran Chiluwal, the general manager of the Chepe Khola Small Hydropower Project, admitted lapses during the construction of the hydropower and transmission line projects.

"We could not get all the paperwork done as many government offices were closed during the Covid-19 pandemic," said Chiluwal.

"Although we had gone to the division forest office to get the permit, we didn't get their adequate support. So, we aren't the only ones to be blamed."

The construction of the hydropower project started in mid-October 2020 with an investment of around Rs1.5 billion. NMB Bank financed Rs1.2 billion.

The project was scheduled to complete and generate electricity on January 23 last year. However, the Covid-19 pandemic affected the completion deadline.



POST FILE PHOTO

The division forest office has also sought clarifications from the sub-divisional forest office in Rainas for not being vigilant when the project construction began.

## WORLD

## BRIEFING

Russia says genetic tests confirm Wagner chief Prigozhin died in plane crash

**MOSCOW:** Russian investigators said on Sunday that genetic tests had confirmed that Yevgeny Prigozhin, chief of the Wagner mercenary group, was among the 10 people killed in a plane crash last Wednesday. Russia's aviation agency had previously published the names of all 10 people on board the private jet which crashed in the Tver region northwest of Moscow. They included Prigozhin and Dmitry Utkin, his right-hand man who helped found the Wagner group. "As part of the investigation of the plane crash in the Tver region, molecular-genetic examinations have been completed," Russia's Investigative Committee said in a statement on its site on the Telegram messaging app. "According to their results, the identities of all 10 dead were established. They correspond to the list stated in the flight sheet," it said. The private jet crashed two months to the day after Prigozhin led an abortive mutiny against Russia's army top brass. President Vladimir Putin described that mutiny as a treacherous "stab in the back", but later met with Prigozhin in the Kremlin. He sent his condolences on Thursday to the families of those the aviation agency said had died in the crash.

Gunman kills three, himself in racially motivated shooting, Jacksonville sheriff says

**JACKSONVILLE:** A white man armed with a high-powered rifle and a handgun killed three Black people at a Dollar General store in Jacksonville, Florida, on Saturday, before shooting himself, in what local law enforcement described as a racially motivated crime. "This shooting was racially motivated, and he hated Black people," Jacksonville Sheriff TK Waters told a press conference. The suspect, whom Waters described as a white male wearing a tactical vest, was not identified. Waters said all three victims—two men and a woman—were Black. Waters said authorities believed the shooter acted alone, and that before the shooting he had authored "several manifestos" for media, his parents and law enforcement detailing his hatred for Black people. Waters described his weapons as a Glock and an "AR-15 style" rifle, with swastikas on it, referring to a lightweight semi-automatic long gun often used in mass shootings. "The hate that motivated the shooter's killing spree adds an additional layer of heartbreak," Waters said.

Uranium enrichment continues based on domestic law: Iran

**DUBAI:** Iran's enrichment of uranium continues based on a framework established by the country's parliament, nuclear chief Mohammad Eslami said on Sunday when asked about reports regarding Tehran slowing down its 60 percent enrichment. "Our nuclear enrichment continues based on the strategic framework law," Eslami said, referring to a related legislation. Earlier this month, the Wall Street Journal reported that Iran had significantly slowed the pace at which it was accumulating near-weapons-grade enriched uranium and diluted some of its stockpile, moves that could help ease tensions with the US and revive broader talks over Iran's nuclear work. In 2020, Iran's hardline parliament passed a law requiring the government to take measures such as stepping up uranium enrichment beyond the limit set under Tehran's 2015 nuclear deal if other parties did not fully comply with the deal. After Washington ditched the deal in 2018 and reimposed sanctions, Tehran began to violate the nuclear curbs set out in the pact. (AGENCIES)

# Firefighters backed by water-dropping planes struggle to control wildfires in Greece

With their hot, dry summers, southern European countries are particularly prone to wildfires.

ASSOCIATED PRESS  
ATHENS, AUG 27

More than 600 firefighters, including reinforcements from several European countries, backed by a fleet of water-dropping planes and helicopters were battling three persistent major wildfires in Greece on Sunday, two of which have been raging for days.

A massive blaze in the country's northeastern regions of Evros and Alexandroupolis, believed to have caused the deaths of 20 people, was burning for a ninth day.

The blaze, one of the largest single wildfires ever to have struck a European Union country, has decimated vast tracts of forest and burnt homes in the outlying areas of the city of Alexandroupolis. On Sunday, 295 firefighters, seven planes and five helicopters were tackling it, the fire department said.

The wildfire has scorched 770 square kilometres of land and had 120 active hotspots, the European Union's Copernicus Emergency Management Service said Sunday.

Copernicus is the EU space programme's Earth observation component and uses satellite imagery to provide mapping data.

On the northwestern fringes of the Greek capital, another major wildfire has been blazing for days, scorching homes and burning into the national park on Mount Parnitha, one of the last green areas near Athens. The fire department said 260 firefighters, one plane and three helicopters were trying to tame the flames.

A third major wildfire started on Saturday on the Cycladic island of Andros and was still burning out of control Sunday, with 73 firefighters, two planes and two helicopters dousing the blaze. Lightning strikes are suspected of having sparked that wildfire.



A file photo shows firefighters evacuating a dog from a house during a wildfire in Acharnes a suburb of northern Athens, Greece.

Greece has been plagued by daily outbreaks of dozens of fires over the past week as gale-force winds and hot, dry summer conditions combined to whip up flames and hamper firefighting efforts. On Saturday, firefighters tackled 122 blazes, including 75 that broke out in the 24 hours between Friday evening and Saturday evening, the fire department said.

With firefighting forces stretched to the limit, Greece has called for help from other European countries. Germany, Sweden, Croatia and Cyprus have sent aircraft, while dozens of Romanian, French, Czech, Bulgarian, Albanian, Slovak and Serb firefighters are helping on the ground.

With their hot, dry summers, southern European countries are particularly prone to wildfires. European Union officials have blamed climate change for the increasing frequency and intensity of wildfires in Europe, noting that 2022 was the second-worst year for wildfire damage on record after 2017.

The causes of Greece's two largest fires have not yet been determined. For some of the smaller blazes, officials have said arson or negligence is suspected, and several people have been arrested.

On Saturday, fire department officials arrested two men, one on the island of Evia and one in the central

Greek region of Larissa, for allegedly deliberately setting fire to dried grass and vegetation to spark wildfires.

Greece imposes wildfire prevention regulations, typically from the start of May to the end of October, to limit activities such as the burning of dried vegetation and the use of outdoor barbecues.

By Friday, fire department officials had arrested 163 people on fire-related charges since the start of the fire prevention season, government spokesman Pavlos Marinakis said, including 118 for negligence and 24 for deliberate arson.

The police had made a further 18 arrests, he said.

## North Korea to allow its citizens to return home

Country is slowly easing its draconian coronavirus curbs.

ASSOCIATED PRESS  
SEOUL, AUG 27

North Korea said on Sunday it will allow its citizens staying abroad to return home in line with easing pandemic situations worldwide, as the country slowly eases its draconian coronavirus restrictions.

In a brief statement carried by state media, the State Emergency Epidemic Prevention Headquarters said those returning to North Korea will be put in quarantine for a week for "proper medical observation."

The statement didn't elaborate. But analysts predicted the announcement would lead to the return of North Korean students, workers and others who have had to stay abroad, mostly in China and Russia, because of the pandemic.

The workers are a key source of foreign income for the country.

North Korea banned tourists, jettied out diplomats and severely curtailed border traffic and trade after the pandemic began.

The lockdown has further worsened the North's chronic economic difficulties and food insecurity.

Earlier this month, South Korea's spy agency said North Korea was preparing to further reopen its borders

gradually in a bid to revive its economy. On Tuesday, a North Korean commercial jet landed in Beijing in what was the North's first such commercial international flight known to leave the country in about 3-and-a-half years. The plane returned from Beijing later in the day, but it wasn't known who was aboard it.

Earlier in August, a group of North Korean taekwondo athletes and officials travelled by land to Beijing and then took a flight to Kazakhstan to participate in an international competition.

The group of around 80 men and women wearing white track suits with the North Korean flag on the front were seen in the departure hall of Beijing's international airport.

It was the first time such a big delegation from North Korea made an international trip since the pandemic began.

In August 2022, North Korea made a highly dubious claim to have overcome the Covid-19 pandemic.

In the following month, the North resumed freight train service with China, its biggest trading partner and economic pipeline, but much of its restrictions on border crossings by individuals have remained in effect.

## 3 US Marines killed, 20 injured in an aircraft crash in Australia

ASSOCIATED PRESS  
CANBERRA, AUG 27

A United States Marine Corps aircraft carrying troops crashed on a north Australian island on Sunday, killing three Marines and injuring 20 during a multinational training exercise, officials said.

Three had been confirmed dead on Melville Island and five of the 23 on board were flown in serious condition 80 kilometres to the mainland city of Darwin for hospital treatment after the Bell Boeing V-22 Osprey tiltrotor aircraft crashed around 9:30 am, a statement from the Marines said.

"Recovery efforts are ongoing," the statement said, adding the cause of the crash was under investigation.

A US military official reported to Australian air traffic controllers a "significant fire in the vicinity of the crash site," according to an audio recording of the conversation broadcast by Nine News television.

Helicopters and fixed-wing aircraft had been deployed to return from the remote location with the rest of the injured, Northern Territory Police Commissioner Michael Murphy said.

One of the injured was undergoing surgery at the Royal Darwin Hospital, Northern Territory Chief Minister Natasha Fyles said around six hours after the crash.



A file photo shows the MV-22B Osprey off the coast of Brisbane.

Some were critically injured and were being triaged on arrival at Darwin's airport, she said.

"We acknowledge that this is a terrible incident," Fyles said. "The Northern Territory government stands by to offer whatever assistance is required."

Australian Prime Minister Anthony Albanese said only Americans were injured in the crash when it happened during Exercise Predators Run, which involves the militaries of the United States, Australia, Indonesia, the Philippines and East Timor.

"The initial reports suggest that the incident involves just US defence force

## Japan says seawater radioactivity below limits near Fukushima

REUTERS  
TOKYO, AUG 27

Tests of seawater near Japan's Fukushima nuclear power plant have not detected any radioactivity, the environment ministry said on Sunday days after authorities began discharging into the sea treated water used to cool damaged reactors.

Japan started releasing water from the wrecked Fukushima plant into the Pacific Ocean on Thursday, sparking protests in Japan and neighbouring countries, in particular China, which banned aquatic product imports from Japan.

Japan and scientific organisations say the water is safe after being filtered to remove most radioactive elements except for tritium, a radioactive isotope of hydrogen.

Because tritium is difficult to separate from water, the Fukushima water is diluted until tritium levels fall below regulatory limits.

The ministry's tests of samples from 11 points near the plant showed concentrations of tritium below the lower limit of detection—7 to 8 becquerels of tritium per litre, the ministry said, adding that it "would have no adverse impact on human health and the environment".

Monitoring would be carried out "with a high level of objectivity, transparency, and reliability" to prevent adverse impacts on Japan's reputation, Environment Minister Akihiro Nishimura said in a statement.

The ministry would publish test results every week for the next three months at least, an official said.

Plant operator Tokyo Electric Power Co (Teppo) said on Friday seawater near the plant contained less than 10 becquerels of tritium per litre, below its self-imposed limit of 700 becquerels and far below the World Health Organisation's limit of 10,000 becquerels for drinking water.

## Ukraine probes incident that killed 3 pilots while Russia attacks with missiles

Kyiv says it was not immediately clear how long the investigation will take.

ASSOCIATED PRESS  
KYIV, AUG 27

Ukrainian authorities have launched an investigation after a midair collision between two warplanes in the west of the country killed three pilots.

Ukraine's air force spokesman Yuri Ihnat told Ukrainian television on Sunday it wasn't immediately clear how long the probe would take.

According to the air force's Telegram page, two L-39 training military aircraft collided on Friday during a combat mission over Ukraine's western Zhytomyr region.

Three pilots were killed, including Andriy Pilshchikov, a well-known pilot with the nickname "Juice" who was an outspoken advocate for Ukraine getting F-16 fighter jets.

President Volodymyr Zelenskyy in his nightly address on Saturday paid tribute to Pilshchikov, describing him as a "Ukrainian officer, one of those who helped our country a lot."

Ukraine's Vasiliv tactical aviation brigade on Sunday identified the other



A man sells balloons next to piles of sandbags in Kyiv, Ukraine on Saturday.

two pilots killed in the collision as Viacheslav Minka and Serhiy Prokazin. Russian forces, in the meantime, targeted central and northern regions of Ukraine with cruise missiles overnight. Ukraine's air force on Sunday reported air defences successfully intercepted four of them.

In Russia, the Defence Ministry reported bringing down two drones over the Bryansk and Kursk regions that border Ukraine.

The drones, the ministry said, were launched by "the Kyiv regime" in "yet another attempt at terrorist attacks" on Russian soil.

## Trump campaign reports raising more than \$7 million after Georgia booking

ASSOCIATED PRESS  
NEW YORK, AUG 27

For former President Donald Trump, a picture is worth... more than \$7 million.

Trump's campaign says he has raised \$7.1 million since Thursday when he was booked at the Fulton County Jail in Georgia on charges that he illegally schemed to overturn the 2020 election in the state and became the first former president in US history to ever have a mug shot taken. Spokesman Steven Cheung said that, on Friday alone, the campaign brought in \$4.18 million—its highest-grossing day to date.

The record haul underscores how Trump's legal woes have been a fundraising boon for his campaign, even as his political operation has spent tens of millions on his defence. The mounting legal charges have also failed to dent Trump's standing in the Republican presidential primary, with the former president now routinely beating his rivals by 30 to 50 points in polls.

While Trump described his appear-



Former President Donald Trump.

ance on Thursday as a "terrible experience" and said posing for the historic mug shot was "not a comfortable feeling," his campaign immediately seized on its fundraising power.

Before he had even flown home to New Jersey, his campaign was using it in fundraising pitches to supporters. Trump amplified that message both on his Truth Social site and by returning to X, the site formerly known as Twitter, for the first time in two-and-a-half years to share the image and direct supporters to a fundraising page.

Within hours, the campaign had

also released a new line of merchandise featuring the image that began with t-shirts and now includes beer Koozies, bumper stickers, a signed poster, bumper stickers and mug shot mugs.

Cheung said that contributions from those who had purchased merchandise or donated without prompting skyrocketed, especially after Trump's tweet.

The new contributions, he said, had helped push the campaign's fundraising haul over the last three weeks to close to \$20 million.

At the same time, Trump's political operation has been burning through tens of millions of dollars on lawyers as he battles charges in four separate jurisdictions. Recent campaign finance filing showed that, while Trump raised over \$53 million during the first half of 2023—a period in which his first two criminal indictments were turned into a rallying cry that sent his fundraising soaring—his political committees have paid out at least \$59.2 million to more than 100 lawyers and law firms since January 2021.

# Lamichhane to fly to Pakistan today

SPORTS BUREAU  
KATHMANDU, AUG 27

Rape-accused cricketer Sandeep Lamichhane will fly to Pakistan on Monday to join his teammates for the Asia Cup 2023.

The 23-year-old Nepal spinner has been accused of raping a 17-year-old minor in August last year.

He was scheduled to go under trial at Kathmandu District Court on Sunday but the hearing was deferred until September 7, according to the Court.

"Sandeep will head to Multan via Qatar Airlines at 11:20 on Monday morning," Cricket Association of Nepal acting secretary Durga Raj Pathak said.

Lamichhane's teammates had reached Pakistan on Wednesday.

Nepal are scheduled to play Pakistan in the inaugural match of the Asia Cup on Wednesday before clashing against India on September 4.

Lamichhane, who was stripped of national captaincy following arrest warrant, and was detained from Tribhuvan International Airport in October but was released on bail.

Lamichhane had also travelled to Zimbabwe to play in the ICC Men's Cricket World Cup Qualifier.

Pakistan are co-hosting the six-team 50-over tournament with Sri Lanka. Four matches will be played in Pakistan while Sri Lanka will host the remaining nine matches including the final.

Nepal are pitted against India and Pakistan in Group A. Sri Lanka, Bangladesh and Afghanistan are in Group B.



AP/REUTERS  
Arsenal are the first Premier League team to concede a first-minute goal three times in a calendar year.

# Early goals 'making life difficult' for Arsenal

The Gunners conceded 57 seconds after kickoff, continuing a trend of giving away sloppy goals at home which contributed to the team's late season collapse in the previous campaign.

REUTERS  
LONDON, AUG 27

Mikel Arteta lamented Arsenal's defensive vulnerability early in games as Fulham became the latest team to score a quick goal to put the hosts immediately on the back foot again in Saturday's 2-2 Premier League draw.

Arsenal conceded 57 seconds after kickoff when Andreas Pereira pounced on a loose back pass and fired the visitors ahead even before fans had taken their seats. The goal made Arsenal the first team in Premier League history to concede a first-minute goal three times in a calendar year.

"We have this situation a thousand times in football. We gave the ball away in a really dangerous area and it was a really cool finish," Arteta told the BBC. "Right from the beginning, we gave an incredible goal away. You make life really difficult for yourself. But the team reacted really well."

"We dominated the game and created countless chances and should have scored five, six, seven goals easily. When you've done the most difficult thing—get back ahead against a well organised team—you have to defend your box from one corner."

After failing to find the net in the first half, Arteta made changes in the

second and he was happy to see substitutes Fabio Vieira and Eddie Nketiah dragging Arsenal back into the game.

Vieira first won the penalty for Bukayo Saka to level the score at 1-1 before providing the assist for Nketiah to make it 2-1.

"Fabio was involved in everything we created and I am really happy with that. To see players with the ability to make and take chances with quality," Arteta said.

"The same with Eddie (Nketiah). It is my fault that Fabio has not played more and today he gave me reasons to play him more."

However, Fulham scored a late equaliser through Joao Palhinha from a corner despite going down to 10 men, which left Arteta fuming as Arsenal dropped two points and failed to move top of the standings.

"We have to show another level of commitment and desire—'over my dead body'. With 10 men, you cannot concede a goal," he said. "It's the only chance they have and you get punished. Yet still you get another two chances and don't score, that's the story of the game."

**Fernandes rescues Man United**

Manchester United's Bruno Fernandes inspired a magnificent comeback and

scored the winner in a thrilling 3-2 defeat of Nottingham Forest.

Erik ten Hag's Manchester United began abysmally against Forest and conceded twice inside the opening five minutes to Steve Cooper's enterprising outfit.

But captain Fernandes, so often United's saviour, lifted the mood with an inspirational display and tucked away a penalty after Forest had been reduced to 10 men to seal the points.

"We showed great character. We didn't start the way we wanted but we came back," the Portuguese said.

"Overall the performance was really good. We stayed patient, knew how to control the ball and that was important to get the three points."

Forest took the lead with a lightning counter-attack from a United corner after two minutes, Taiwo Awoniyi showing electrifying pace to race from the centre circle and slot a fine finish past home goalkeeper Andre Onana.

Willy Boly was then left unmarked to head in Forest's second and leave the home fans stunned.

United got the quick response they needed however with Marcus Rashford's cut back being touched in by Cristian Eriksen.

Casemiro levelled early in the second half from a Fernandes knock

down header and Forest had to play the latter stages with 10 men after Joe Worrall was red-carded for hauling down Fernandes outside the area in the 67th minute.

Daniilo then sent Rashford to the deck with a slight nudge in the 75th minute and Fernandes kept his cool to tuck away the penalty that leaves United sixth on six points.

West Ham United beat Brighton & Hove Albion 3-1.

James Ward-Prowse opened the scoring for the Hammers and Jarrod Bowen and Michail Antonio netted in the second half as West Ham clipped the wings of the Seagulls, who had led the standings after two games with six points.

Everton are rock bottom after a third successive defeat, this time falling 1-0 at home to Wolverhampton Wanderers.

Sasa Kalajdzic scored three minutes from the end to hand Wolves their first win of the season and pile on the misery for the hosts who wasted several good chances.

Brentford remain unbeaten although they were denied victory as Crystal Palace's Joachim Andersen cancelled out Kevin Schade's first-half opener at a rain-soaked Community Stadium.

ENGLISH PREMIER LEAGUE RESULTS table with columns for teams and scores.

LA LIGA RESULTS table with columns for teams and scores.

LIGUE 1 RESULTS table with columns for teams and scores.

ICC MEN'S ODI TEAM RANKINGS table listing countries and their rankings.

Note: Pakistan rose to the top of the ODI rankings with a 3-0 whitewash of Afghanistan in Colombo on Saturday.

### QUOTE OF THE DAY



If you want to be the best player in the world, you have to be ready for that. You just have to use the experience and the confidence, but still remember that the most important thing is to develop as a player. World number one Iga Swiatek says ahead of US Open, which begins on Monday.

# Andreescu pulls out of US Open

REUTERS  
LONDON, AUG 27

Former champion Bianca Andreescu has withdrawn from the US Open due to injury, organisers said on Saturday, after the Canadian suffered a stress fracture in her back.

Andreescu, who won the tournament in 2019, lost her opening match at the Citi Open in Washington DC last month before going down in straight sets to Camila Giorgi at the Canadian Open. She appeared to be in discomfort against Italian Giorgi and needed to call a physiotherapist on court.

Andreescu then withdrew from the Cincinnati Masters.

Andreescu, 23, was scheduled to face Ukraine's Lesia Tsurenko in the US Open first round.

Former world number two Paula Badosa also said that she would miss the year's last Grand Slam with an injury.

# HOROSCOPE

ARIES (March 21-April 19) The dream realms will be active early today, supercharging your intuition as you sleep. ... TAURUS (April 20-May 20) Today will give you an edge when it comes to professional ambitions. ... GEMINI (May 21-June 21) You should feel elevated and optimistic when you awaken.

CANCER (June 22-July 22) A crisp and exciting energy will linger in the air. These vibes are perfect for shedding stress, conflict, or fear. ... LEO (July 23-August 22) Allow your quirky side to shine, supercharging the sector of your chart that governs love. ... VIRGO (August 23-September 22) Consider changing up your routines, asking you to revolutionise your habits.

LIBRA (September 23-October 22) The weirdo that lives within will stir today. Don't hesitate to bring drama, elevating your ego with aesthetic choices that resonate with your outgoing mood. ... SCORPIO (October 23-November 21) The energy in your home should feel elevated and playful this morning. ... SAGITTARIUS (November 22-December 21) Your social skills will be exceptional, sharpening your wits and ability to articulate complex ideas.

CAPRICORN (December 22-January 19) The universe will look for ways to bless you. Opportunities for prosperity and unexpected kindness may fall in your lap, making it an excellent time to focus on what you hope to manifest. ... AQUARIUS (January 20-February 18) Today will act as a breath of cosmic fresh air. It is perfect for embracing new journeys, making it the perfect time to ask out your crush or start a passion project. ... PISCES (February 19-March 20) Give yourself plenty of space to quiet down and enjoy solitude.

# CROSSWORD

- ACROSS: 1 Actuality, 5 Accumulate, 10 Quite some time, 14 Tape delay effect, 15 Rhinal, 16 Folk wisdom, 17 "You said it!", 18 Put away (2 wds.), 19 Forfeit, 20 Corrects, 22 Worn down or away, 24 Dimple, 25 Quarrel, 26 Drifting, 29 Sharpen, 30 Newspaper sections, 33 Jester, 34 Use with others, 35 Fetch, 36 Weather word, 37 Galoot, 38 Of sound mind, 39 "To — is human ...", 40 Word in a commandment, 42 Semblance, 43 Catch sight of, 44 Cod or Canaveral, 45 Mended, 46 Sluggish.

PREVIOUS PUZZLE SOLVED grid with words like POTTS, TWIST, MAKE, ENOL, ANNIS, SARATOGA, I AM B, PALM, SLOOP, RECT, LUTE, EURO, SOT, PREMIERE, HALT, LAIR, MEAD, STORMS, ASIA, ASYOR, NOAH, MEND, STARR, ELLE, HEDGE, DEED.

Large crossword puzzle grid with numbered squares for clues.

# SUDOKU

Sudoku puzzle grid with numbers 1-9 and a difficulty rating of five stars.

# 'Folk music is the soul of Nepal's agrarian history'

Kamali Kanta Bhetuwal's song 'Jhamke Guleli' struck a chord with many because of its *purbeli* tone, accompanied by earnest and imaginative lyrics.

URZA ACHARYA  
KATHMANDU

**K**amali Kanta Bhetuwal grew up in the hills of Sankhuwasabha. His was an agrarian family—deeply entrenched in the labour of soil. When he was only nine or ten, Bhetuwal accompanied his grandfather to the fields. As his grandfather walked the soil with *halo* (plough), he sang. Some of his tunes were hopeful, others were melancholic—but all reminisced the perils of the agrarian life. "I could've spent hours hearing him sing," he says.

Even as an adult, he still hasn't been able to give those songs up. But now, he isn't just a listener. He also sings, collects and composes tunes in the *Purbeli bhaka* (tunes from eastern Nepal), hoping to preserve them for future generations. One particular song, 'Jhamke Guleli' found notability after Bhetuwal first recorded with Radio Nepal in 2009. *Purbeli bhakas* are known for their mellow, soft music and sombre lyrics, featuring allusion to nature, religion and romantic love. Songs like 'Jhamke Guleli' and the iconic 'Wari Jamuna' by Khem Raj Gurung have become synonymous with Eastern folk music practices and have garnered a lot of devoted audiences.

Bhetuwal was drawn to *lok geet* (folk songs) because he finds them calming and honest. "Village elders used to sit under the Peepal tree and hum tunes about their hardships. But somehow, the tunes were always hopeful," he remembers.



WHY DO IT

Bhetuwal was introduced to *aadhunik geet* (modern songs from the 1970s) when he came to Dhankhuta after his SLC (now SEE) exam. "Back then, Radio Nepal was the single most influential medium," he says, remembering how he became enamoured with the songs played there—tunes by Narayan Gopal, Kabita Ale and the like. Even then, perhaps because of his upbringing, he was still drawn to folk tunes rather than the then-experimental music of musicians from the Valley.

By the time he entered Kathmandu, Bhetuwal had already collected several local tunes and verses from his hometown. "I realised I needed to document these tunes before they became obsolete," he says. So, surviving on the money his father sent him, he began frequenting the premises of Radio Nepal, hoping to have



POST PHOTO: HEMANTA SHRESTHA

one of his songs recorded. Of many songs he pitched to Radio Nepal, his mentors liked the novelty of 'Jhamke Guleli', which became his first recording.

The chorus and tune for 'Jhamke Guleli' isn't his, Bhetuwal admits. With folk songs, it is often difficult to point out one person as the sole creator, as the tunes are usually picked up by multiple people and modified according to their experiences. "I first heard it through my maternal uncle, Guru Prasad Subedi, an incredibly talented man with a voice smooth as honey," he says. "When I asked him if I could borrow the tune from him, he gave me his blessings."

As the recording began, the song caused a bit of controversy: A part of its now iconic line, "*Ma auda chai oi bhana hai, jhamke guleli*," (When I arrive, call me over by yelling 'oi') was deemed inappropriate by those in Radio Nepal. Originally, the 'oi'—an exclamatory phrase used to attract someone's attention—was actually '*poi*', an informal slang for a husband or male lover.

"I was told '*poi*' rendered the song vulgar. But that was part of the song's original lyrics, and I didn't want to change it," he says. In a way, the lyrics was sanitised for the Kathmanduite ears—and according to him, he was asked to abandon the essence of what made the song so entrenched in folk culture. "Eventually, I decided that 'oi' would be the best replacement," he says.

After its release, 'Jhamke Guleli' became a hit. Bhetuwal's eastern dialect, accompanied by imaginative lyrics, struck a chord with many Nepalis—especially those reminiscing about their village life from the city. The comments under its YouTube release—which has over 1.3 million views—are evidence that the mellow tone of the song brought back memories of childhood and a simple time. After the song's success, he recorded 'Maga ma Maga', 'Jhim Jhim Pareli', and 'Pathhar Koila', among others.

For his recording of 'Jhamke Guleli', Bhetuwal reveals he was given Rs400 as an artist fee. "I wasn't worried about money at the time; I just wanted the song to reach the masses," he says. Fearing that the song's original recording might get lost, he eventually digitised and sold it to Music Nepal for a meagre fee. "I was told I would get 60% royalty whenever my song was used. I received around Rs15,000 during the early years, but they haven't called me for the past few years," he says.

Music Nepal, one of the largest music distributors in Nepal, has been accused by artists of depriving them of royalties—especially those earned through digital platforms. For instance, in 2014, Music Nepal uploaded a playlist of Bhetuwal's music titled 'Jhamke Guleli Jukebox' with over 900,000 views. However, he now has little to no distributing rights to own songs and doesn't receive compensation for any songs uploaded online or played at events.

"Every time I ask them about TikTok

and social media, they act clueless," he says. "As long as they continue providing these unique folks tunes to the masses, I'm willing to live with the compromise."

Bhetuwal reveals that he was also approached by Music Nepal to re-record 'Jhamke Guleli' and modify the song to fit the modern context to make it more palatable for the budding audience. However, he refused. "They wanted me to add quirky one-liners and lyrics with innuendos, which I declined," he says.

**For his recording of 'Jhamke Guleli,' reveals Bhetuwal, he was given Rs400 as an artist fee by Radio Nepal in 2009.**

Bhetuwal feels that folk songs are currently facing a crisis of vulgarity and sensationalisation. Perhaps to compete with the saturated market, modern folk singers have abandoned the soft and melancholic tunes of the past and adapted a more commercial approach—borrowing local tunes to sing about sex and physical attraction. This phenomenon, termed by one writer as 'cringe/vulgar folk' or '*chaada lok*', garners millions of views despite scrutiny. Moreover, it is also marred with misogyny, colourism and overt sexualis-

ation of its female dancers and actors.

"Folk songs are getting a bad rep because of how misused they are. It has come to a point where it's embarrassing to associate with *lok geet*," he says. "That is truly heartbreaking."

Despite hardships, Bhetuwal's love for *raithane bhaka* hasn't diminished. He has travelled to almost all districts in the East—from Sindupalchowk to Tanahun and Bhojpur and has collaborated with and collected local tunes from villagers.

"I have hundreds of recordings and verses saved in my phone. Right now, I don't have the resources to record them all. But eventually, they will be brought to the audience," he says.

Along with singing and composing, Bhetuwal is currently doing a PhD in folk songs—studying the phenomenon of 'code mixing' in folk music. In the context of his research, code mixing refers to the use of non-Nepali words—say Sanskrit or Hindi—in Nepali language folk songs. "I'm trying to figure out ways through which new words are added to the folk lyrics," he says.

Bhetuwal reveals that he is eternally thankful to his grandfather and village elders who instilled in him a love and pride for folk music. "These songs were a way to come together and share our feelings at a time where talking openly about things wasn't common," he says. "Folk music is the very soul of Nepal's villages—especially how it celebrates agrarian lifestyle."

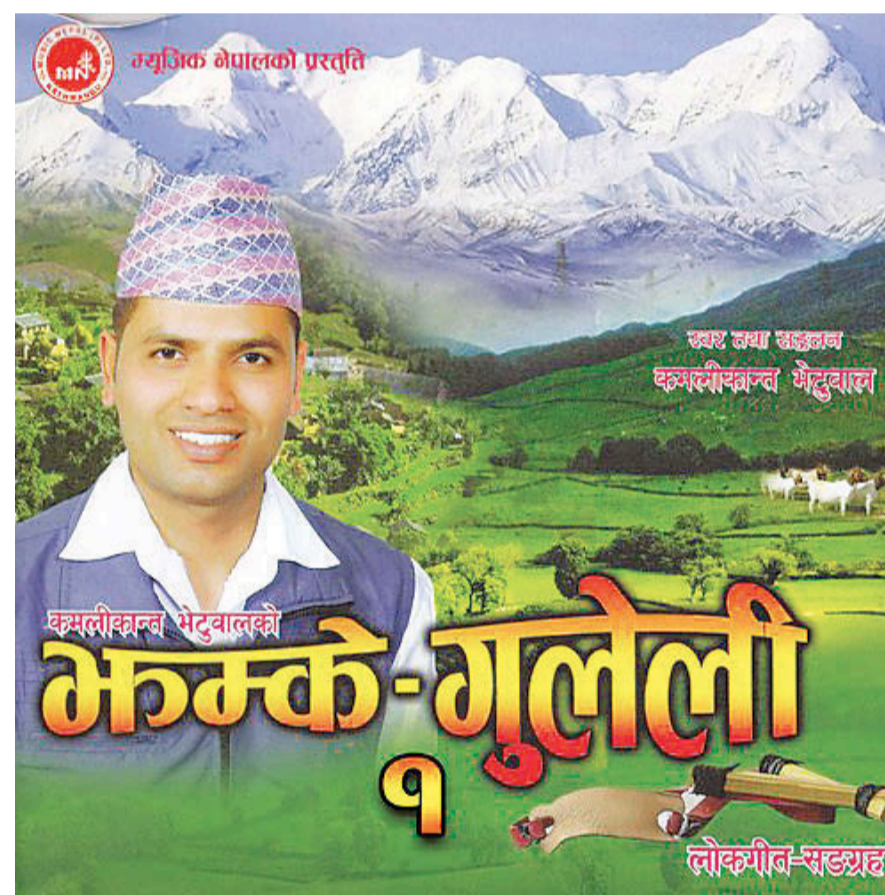


PHOTO: COURTESY OF KAMALI KANTA BHETUWAL

Album cover of Bhetuwal's first album, 'Jhamke Guleli.'

## How Kashmir's papier mâché craft has waned in its authenticity

Owing to years of natural catastrophes, violent conflicts, and a pandemic, the tradition is struggling to stay afloat in a world of westernised demands.

DEEPANSHU MOHAN, ISHFAQ AHMAD WANI,  
TAVLEEN KAUR, HIMA TRISHA,  
YASHOVARDHAN CHATURVEDI & ANOUSHA SINGH

**I**n India, several handicrafts have relinquished their originality due to rampant commercialisation. Consequently, many well-respected artisans are made to overwork yet underpaid. One such handicraft is the art of papier mâché.

The traditional papier-mâché pieces of art from Kashmir are well-known worldwide. The art form, with a long and rich cultural history, was once a hallmark of the market for luxury items. Owing to years of natural catastrophes, violent conflicts, and a pandemic, the tradition of paper mâché is struggling to stay afloat in a world of automated and Westernised demands.

In the early 2010s, the future of papier mâché was promising.

Artisans were respected, papier mâché designs largely consisted of traditional motifs, and as a bonus, the government provided a loan to these artisans to aid their production costs. This loan enabled the artisans to set up their factories or *karkhanas* (factories) to improve production and encourage the youth to

enter the industry. Simultaneously, the automation of the production of Pashmina shawls around these years led to a shift of women's labour towards the papier mâché industry.

The papier mâché industry was flourishing to the point where the exporters witnessed an annual turnover of Rs5 crore. Unfortunately, all of this took a turn for the worse with the 2014 floods.

In 2014, Kashmir experienced massive floods that stranded thousands of people inside their submerged houses. The floods killed more than 300 people and rendered people with nearly no resources. The cost to the economy stood at more than Rs10,000,000.

Over time, everything came back to normal, however, the papier mâché industry did not. The artisans lost finished goods and raw materials. They could no longer support the newly established '*karkhanas*'.

As Aadil Hussain\* explains, "Artisans were provided a subsidised loan of Rs100,000 in 2010 to support the revival of this craft. With the help of the loan, I established my own papier mâché workshop. However, in 2014, my workshop suffered complete destruction due to the floods. Unfortunately, due to the absence of insurance coverage and the burden of high-interest rates, I couldn't repay this loan."

After the floods, there was no support from the government's end to help the artisans get back on their feet; rather, there was a sudden rise in the interest rates on the loans taken before the floods. This further led to more problems for the artisans. Thus, the lack of resources and loss of finished goods set the papier mâché industry back to the point where they could no longer pay interest on the previously taken loans or sustain a livelihood with the minimal income they managed to earn. All of this forced many artisans to leave the papier mâché industry and move to safer, better-earning jobs.

As quoted by one of the exporters we interviewed, the annual turnover of the export line of Kashmir fell by ninety million rupees, all due to the conflict in the state and the pandemic-induced lockdowns. Such a significant fall in exports further deteriorated the market conditions, making it harder for the art to survive.

With hardly any help from the government, the artisans have been forced to depend on bulk export orders to support their livelihood, and even then, they are hardly able to manage to make ends meet. Saad Naqash\*, 37, said, "Changes in the craft of papier mâché have been significant, driven by consumer demands. As a result, the traditional design of papier mâché has

undergone a complete transformation."

Currently, the production of the art is largely in accordance with the requirements of buyers abroad, that is, the traditional designs (which consist of motifs) have started disappearing from the mainstream market. "Nowadays," Saad\* continues, "the focus is on mass production, leading to the creation of papier mâché products in bulk quantities, sometimes reaching thousands. However, this shift towards quantity over quality has impacted the overall craftsmanship and authenticity of papier mâché."

The continued commercialisation and international demand for the craft from the West inevitably required the local artisans to depend on middlemen as a medium of bulk export. This is primarily because the artisans lack the resources to export the products directly. As a result, they have to rely heavily on exporters to help them earn a living.

There are conflicting opinions on how these exporters contribute to keeping papier mâché alive. While some artisans believe they get a fair price from the exporters for their products, others do not. Instead, others believe that the competition between the exporters causes a rise in the prices of raw materials for production. So, while the selling price remains the same and as the cost price increases, it is the artisans who must face the music and endure the difference, resulting in less earnings.

Muqsood Ahmad Ganie sheds more light on this situation by comparing the costs of raw papier mâché balls. "The makers of raw material are in a position to bargain for a better price because only a limited number of individuals are now available who can make bases of papier mâché products. For example, the cost of raw papier mâché balls for *chith wala* (made of raw material) belonging to the Sunni community has increased from Rs8 to Rs19 from 2019 to 2023, but the cost for us who give the final touch to these products has decreased."

"Artists like us are not getting their due recognition and amount. Another example here, last year the labour cost per box was Rs15 and the cost of camel colour tubes was Rs6, but now the cost of the same colour is Rs30 and the labour cost of the box is the same."

On the other side, the exporters face difficulties due to inconsistent transport charges and stoppage at customs—both of which can easily be solved by government intervention.

\*Names of all respondents have been changed to protect their identity and maintain anonymity.

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Papier-mâché with paint and gold leaf.

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